

Benjamin Rush Birthplace
Red Lion Road, between Academy
and Knight Roads
Philadelphia (Torresdale)
Philadelphia County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-1796

HABS
PA,
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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

BENJAMIN RUSH BIRTHPLACE

HABS No. PA-1796

Location: North side of Red Lion Road, between Academy and Knight Roads, Philadelphia (Torresdale section), Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania.

Present Use: The house was accidentally destroyed by a bulldozer on February 1969.

Significance: Benjamin Rush, a signer of the Declaration of Independence and a member of a socially prominent Philadelphia family, was born in this house.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: The house was built in three portions at different times: Left portion (south), ca. 1690; Center portion (middle), before 1765; Right portion (north, frame addition), mid-19th century.
2. Alterations and additions: The roofs had been rebuilt. A porch was added sometime in the 19th century. The center and north portions, already mentioned above, are considered additions. Other changes had been made in the mid-19th century.

- B. Historical Context: In addition to his fame as a signer of the Declaration of Independence, Benjamin Rush was the founder of the science of psychiatry, the first professor of chemistry at the University of Pennsylvania Medical School (the first in the nation), and a physician in the Continental Army. He was also a co-founder of the nation's first abolitionist society, and a founder of the Dickinson College and the Franklin and Marshall College.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: A typical Pennsylvania farmhouse in the two earliest portions.
2. Condition of fabric: In 1959 HABS architectural data of the building, the building's condition was written as "good."

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: Approximately 25' x 60', including the original (south) portion and the middle and north additions. The south and middle portions were two-and-a-half

stories high. The north portion was three stories high. The entire structure was rectangular in layout.

2. Foundations: Fieldstone (possibly in the two older portions only).
3. Walls: South and center portions: coursed fieldstone walls with adjoining vertical joint, stuccoed and painted under porch (see HABS photograph, PA-1796-1). North (right) portion: horizontal lapped clapboards painted white.
4. Structural system, framing: Loadbearing walls on south and center portions; frame on north addition.
5. Porches: A one-story roofed porch was across the entire front elevation of the structure. The columns had recessed panels that ran in a vertical line, and were finished with plain plinths and capitals. The porch of the north addition was screened, and had a "balustrade" on its roof.
6. Chimneys: South (left) portion had original corbeled foundation in cellar; above it was a rebuilt chimney. Another chimney was between the center and north (right) portions. Both chimneys were stuccoed.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: A mid-19th century replacement door was on the main entrance in the center of the front elevation. It is not known if any other doors also existed in the house.
 - b. Windows and shutters: In the basement, in the wall between the south and center portions, there was the only remaining original window frame of the 17th century part of the house. The frame was square in shape, and the sash was missing. Other windows in the left and center portions, first and second stories, were late 18th century and/or early 19th century. First floor windows had 12/12 lights. Second floor windows had common 6/6 lights. Front and rear dormer windows had 6/6 lights. The windows of the north portion had 6/6 lights. There was a modern one-light window on the side elevation of the north portion in the first floor, possibly a casement. Shutters on the first floor windows in the two earliest portions were raised three-panel, 18th century, with old hardware and closing devices.
8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: A gable roof covered the south (left) and center portions. In the early 19th century this roof was rebuilt and raised to about one foot over original roof level. The north (right) portion had a separate gable roof, since it was a half story higher than the two earliest portions. Covering for both roofs was asphalt shingles over wood shingles.

There was a pent roof originally in the left portion between first and second floors. It was already removed when the house was documented.

- b. Cornice, eaves: Simple box cornice on left and center portions. The north addition had exposed eaves.
- c. Dormers: Two shed-roofed dormers were in the center of the structure, near the juncture of the walls of the left and center portions.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The house had been altered into a center-hall type plan. The living room was on the left of the hall, and the dining room was on the right, with a kitchen beyond. In the right portion, there were three bedrooms on the second floor, and two bedrooms on the third floor.
2. Stairways: The main stairway was located in the rear of the hall. It was installed in the 19th century, and was L-shaped and had handsome mahogany spindles and balusters. There was also a small winding stairs, located between the center and right portions.
3. Flooring: Most original floors and joists were replaced. Replacement flooring was of two kinds: wide random-width tongue-and-groove boards and butt-end pine boards with some remaining original pegs.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster.
5. Doors and doorways: The doorways were of plain mid-19th century style. Some of the doors were handsome 18th century raised panel doors.
6. Trim: Mostly plain mid-19th century.
7. Hardware: Modern hardware in some places. Some old hardware on window shutters - strap hinges and closing pulls.

8. Heating: The living room had a modern fireplace with an old brick hearth. Other fireplaces were probably early 19th century.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The front elevation faced southeast. The house was approached by a cinder and stone driveway.
2. Historic landscape design: Landscaping was not noteworthy and merely consisted of evergreens and shrubs.
3. Outbuilding: See Benjamin Rush Birthplace, Spring House, HABS No. PA-1796-A, for a photo of the old spring house.

From raw data written by:

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